

Narrator:

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Yasmin Siraj is 13 years old. And already she is one of the best young U.S. figure skaters. She took second place in the junior division of the U.S. Figure Skating Championships this year. Now, she is preparing for her first international meet, in April 2010 in Italy.

Yasmin watched the Winter Olympics in Vancouver, Canada, on television this year. And she knows that when the Winter Olympics open four years from now in the Russian resort city of Sochi, she will be the same age that the top U.S. skaters are today. But Yasmin is not training for the Olympics. In fact, she says she doesn't really think about that much. She has other things on her mind, like playing piano, doing homework, listening to music, and hanging out with her friends when she gets the chance. What's more, her mother says, the goal of figure skating for Yasmin and her 15-year-old sister, Layla, has been to learn and to have fun, not to win medals.

For Yasmin's parents, the idea of ice skating was really quite exotic. Her father, Ra'ad, grew up as the son of a Saudi diplomat, and Yasmin's mother, Aban, lived in Iran until she was a teenager. The two met in the United States as graduate students. When she was a little girl, Yasmin's sister Layla was very tall for her age, and Aban thought that ice skating might help her with balance. Yasmin wanted to skate, too, and the club eventually changed its minimum age for skaters so that she could. As a result, Yasmin has been skating since she was three years old.

The community around Boston, Massachusetts, in which Yasmin and her family live is an important part of their lives. People from a remarkable array of nationalities have become Yasmin's friends and teachers. She has taken Persian language classes to learn about Persian culture. She also plays piano, in part, to balance the skating. Yasmin goes to a regular public school but squeezes an hour of skating practice into the middle of the day — while other students have a study period, lunch and recess — and gets another hour at the rink after school.

Yasmin says she loves the speed, the spins, and the jumps in skating. She also says piano playing helps her with the skating, because both of her passions have made her more disciplined. For Yasmin, the artistic expression of each has helped enrich the other.

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